DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 960 EA 026 842

AUTHOR Davis, Bruce
TITLE How To Involve Parents in a Multicultural School.
INSTITUTION Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Va.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-87120-247-6
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 65p.
AVAILABLE FROM Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1250 North Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 (Stock No. 1-95081).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Diversity (Institutional); Elementary Secondary Education; *Family School Relationship; *Multicultural Education; Organizational Climate; *Parent Participation; Parent Role; *Parent School Relationship; Parent Teacher Conferences; Principals; Public Schools; Urban Education

ABSTRACT

This handbook, written by the principal of an urban elementary school that serves a diverse student population in a low socioeconomic area, offers strategies for principals who wish to increase parent involvement in their schools. Chapter 1 presents a brief history of parent involvement in American public schools over the past 60 years. The next three chapters offer suggestions for laying the foundation, conducting a parent school-satisfaction survey, and building trust. The fifth chapter describes strategies for managing communication--for working with the media, students, parents, and staff. Guidelines for linking community agencies to the school and for working with ethnic groups are provided in chapters 6 and 7. Volunteering truthful information to those served by the school is identified as the key to successful parent-school relations. Five figures are included. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 384 960

How to Involve Parents in a Multicultural School

Bruce Davis

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Brandt

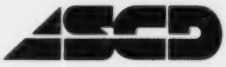
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

EA 026 842

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

How to Involve Parents in a Multicultural School

Bruce Davis



Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Alexandria, Virginia

The Author
Bruce McDonnell Davis is Principal of the Ralph Waldo Emerson School in the Garvey School District in Rosemead, California. Emerson is a California Distinguished School, and Davis was chosen as a Reader's Digest American Hero in Education for 1995. Address correspondence to the author at 1132 S. 4th Street, Alhambra, CA 91801. Telephone: Home (818) 576-2854; Work (818) 307-3333.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1250 N. Pitt Street • Alexandria, VA 22314
Telephone: (703) 549-9110 • Fax: (703) 549-3891

Copyright © 1995 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from ASCD.

ASCD publications present a variety of viewpoints. The views expressed or implied in this book should not be interpreted as official positions of the Association.

Printed in the United States of America.

Gene R. Carter, *ASCD Executive Director*
Ronald S. Brandt, *Director of Publications*
Nancy Modrak, *Managing Editor, ASCD Books*
Carolyn R. Pool, *Associate Editor*
Gary Bloom, *Manager, Design and Production Services*
Stephanie A. Justen, *Print Production Coordinator*
Valerie Sprague, *Desktop Publisher*

From the Editors: We welcome readers' comments on ASCD books and other publications. If you would like to give us your opinion of this book or suggest topics for future books, please write to ASCD, Managing Editor of Books, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314.

ASCD Stock No.: 1-95081

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Davis, Bruce, 1936-
How to involve parents in a multicultural school / Bruce Davis.
p. cm.
ISBN 0-87120-247-6
1. Education—Parent participation—United States. 2. Minority students—Education—United States. 3. Home and school—United States. 4. Pluralism (Social sciences)—United States. I. Title.
LC225.3.D38 1995
649'.68—dc20 95-4383
CIP

How to Involve Parents in a Multicultural School

Introduction: You've Got Trouble	1
1 A Brief History of Parent Involvement	4
2 Laying the Foundation	10
3 The Survey	18
4 Building a Sense of Trust and Confidence	23
5 Communication Management	35
6 Linking Community Agencies to the School	40
7 Working Effectively with Ethnic Groups	45
Conclusion: Teamwork, Truth, and Trust	54

Introduction
You've Got Trouble

> You've got trouble, my friends, right here in River City.
>
> —Professor Harold Hill
> *The Music Man*

I'M CERTAIN THAT THIS QUOTE FROM *THE MUSIC MAN* REFLECTS THE thoughts of school administrators charged with increasing or even maintaining parent involvement. Usually this responsibility falls on the school principal, but principals fortunate enough to have a vice-principal may delegate the task. And it's a task that's becoming increasingly difficult. To make matters worse, as a principal, you wonder how you'll facilitate additional parent involvement while juggling a myriad of problems, crises, and absurdities—the complexities of which most seasoned managers in the private sector would find impossible to comprehend, let alone solve. You, on the other hand, are more or less accustomed to the stress and turmoil because you've probably been in the business a few years, and you've learned to take it in stride.

If your mother and father watched you work, they'd be proud, especially if they understood what you do. If they're not in the education business, they have no idea what you do. They may be like the public, believing that you spend a great deal of time disciplining students. Actually, this aspect of your work takes little time. If your parents were formerly in the business and left, for even as little as a year, when they returned they'd find that education has changed a great deal in 12 months. But they should know this: You're a hero in the ever-increasing struggle to provide quality education for students, against impossible odds.

Nobody said it would be easy, but nobody told you how difficult it would be. You *can* do it—and not only that, you'll do it *better* than it has been done before because that's the nature of school principals who excel and survive.

A typical elementary school principal starts 50 new tasks an hour, and each task is interrupted one and a half times. It's worse for intermediate and high school principals, although they usually have more assistants. Fifty tasks an hour equals 400 tasks per one 8-hour day—and when was the last time you spent only 8 hours at school?

Since you're unable to complete 2,000 tasks a week, you must hold many of those tasks in your mental cupboard until you have all the pieces needed to assemble solutions. Thus, at any one time, you have a plethora of unfinished projects stored on sagging mental shelves. Some projects are dusty. You're unable to find parts for others. Often many tasks are on out on the workbench. These tasks are frequently mandated by your state, school district, or the federal government. You're a victim of your own creativity in that you've created projects you feel are important, and other work is encroaching on these projects. This gives you a mental blister the size of Mount Rushmore because you can't keep up.

How Would I Know?

I'm an elementary school principal in a low socioeconomic area with a school enrollment of 650 students. Twenty-three of those students are Anglo. The rest are evenly divided between Asians and Latins. The Asian students have roots in China, Hong Kong, Laos, Taiwan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Mayanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand, to name a few Asian countries. Most of my Latin students are Mexican-American; but many of our Latin students come from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Peru, and Columbia. Lately, to make life more interesting, several Chinese students have come in from Latin American countries speaking both Spanish and Chinese; and their parents want them placed in bilingual Spanish/English classes. They reason that their children can continue to improve their Chinese at neighborhood Chinese schools on Saturdays and learn English and Spanish at

school. Our parent meetings are conducted with simultaneous translations in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and the Chinese dialects of Cantonese, Mandarin, Chao Chow, and Fukienese. School newsletters are sent home in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese.

In addition to the challenges generated by a diverse population, I must work as effectively as possible with a fairly large staff. I supervise 69 employees, with one secretary.

My official hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. But I'm an early bird—I arrive at work at 5:20 a.m. and work at warp speed until 4:30 p.m. Night meetings and weekend school board retreats are, of course, extra. Four times a year, I eat lunch out; usually I eat at my desk while I deal with the problems all principals know pop up at lunch recess. Many principals devote extra time to the end of the day. I'm as pressed as a Peking duck by dinnertime and anxious for some free time. My life is pretty much like that of other elementary school principals. But it's at home at night and on weekends that I put forth my best effort to continue our high level of parent involvement.

I hope you believe in parent involvement. My task is easier if you do. If so, you could skip Chapter 1, on why parent involvement is important to you and your school. On the other hand, perhaps you shouldn't skip it because I'm going to make the strong argument that dynamic parent involvement will not only help your students and staff but may well save your life—or at least, your job.

In Chapter 1, I share a brief history of parent involvement in public schools over the past 60 years. I relate how I believe it is happening now and what might occur in the future. You think you've heard this before. I expect you will have heard some of it; but I believe I can promise you some new ideas that work—and work against all odds. That's what you need—new ideas that will work; save your job; and, in the long run, make your school life easier.

1
A Brief History of Parent Involvement

The Recent Past

To me, the recent past is the last 60 years. During the first 30 years of that time period, many families in the United States consisted of a mom, a dad, a couple of children, and a pet. Often mom didn't work outside of the home except perhaps during World War II in defense plants. Men tipped their hats to women as they approached on the streets. Children clustered around the radio to listen to Captain Midnight dispense secret information that they quickly decoded on their code-a-graph rings. Usually the word *Ovaltine*, the show's sponsor, was inserted into the message. You'd go to bed dreaming of cracking a spy ring while you chugged down the chocolate drink and woke up to the truth: You had to take the public bus to school. My school was P.S. 49.

At P.S. 49, in Baltimore, Maryland, Miss Walker, the principal, kept busy disciplining the likes of me for trying to feed worms to Beatrice, a lanky lass who delighted in sticking boys with a pearl-topped hatpin. Miss Walker hoped children were buying savings bond stamps. As for parent involvement, she didn't have to worry about School Advisory Councils (SACs), School Site Councils (SSCs), Bilingual District Advisory Councils (BDACs), or even Asian District Advisory Councils (ADACs). They didn't exist. The federal government had little direct involvement in the schools. Even though SACs, SSCs, BDACs, and ADACs hadn't appeared on the horizon, there was a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). Miss Walker cared about the PTA, but she didn't have to worry that the PTA would disappear

overnight because the neighborhood had suddenly developed a transient population. People stayed put. Parents wanted to belong to the PTA. It was, in some communities, and perhaps still is, a worthwhile organization where one could not only assist children but also derive a certain amount of prestige and quasi-fulfillment. Getting involved in the PTA, was, in a word, appropriate. In many parts of the country today, this is less true than in the past.

Gone are the nights when teachers were required to attend PTA meetings. Gone are the days when PTA chairmanships were filled from A to Z. All Miss Walker had to worry about was the petty politics of her local PTA and how to assist the group in making enough money to purchase a new 16-millimeter projector so teachers could show "educational films." She didn't have to manage the politics of more than one parent organization. Miss Walker didn't have the pressure you have. She didn't need several kinds of parent organizations, including PTA, with federal and state review teams looking over her shoulder to see if she had parents involved and if those parents were truly representative of her student population. She didn't need to pack parents to the rafters to impress the superintendent and board of education, let alone state and federal authorities. She didn't need parents to sign off on the school plan, the school site self-study, or any of the other actions we now find so time consuming. In comparison, her life was easy. But the '60s were fast approaching—the decade that saw the beginning of increased federal and state intervention. Along with federal money came the mandate that you must have parent involvement— even if parents don't wish to be involved. Nobody said this would be easy.

The Present

I have given you some idea of what I face daily. If you administer a school in the core of a major city, most likely you think I have it easy in comparison to your challenges. You're correct. But as I promised earlier, I believe I can still share some helpful thoughts, regardless of your situation.

People in the United States are working harder and faster than ever before. Some reports claim our level of

productivity has surpassed the Japanese. Americans are even buying American cars. Because we work so hard, we're the laughingstock of the French. In France, the entire nation shuts down for August. But I can tell you, fellow administrators, that we're not alone. I've received letters from school administrators in European countries and Canada telling me they're working harder than ever to increase parent involvement. I even received a letter from a school administrator in Estonia when the Soviet Union was breaking up; and this administrator was desperate for parent involvement ideas. You must admire a principal who's eager to get the jump on parent involvement when Molotov cocktails are whizzing through the air.

Now school administrators are kept jumping as they check the districtwide computer network for e-mail and respond to faxes—an invention that's increased the pace of our lives, by conservative estimate, at least tenfold. With three telephone lines coming in, compared to the one I had when I started in this business, plus conference-call capability, I'm reaching out to more people than ever before and being touched by others more than is good for my mind. Like you, I'm overwhelmed with paperwork, much of which is required by the state and the federal government.

To add to the excitement, I'm swimming in a cultural stew with 19 different languages. Many of the families I serve come from cultures where parent involvement is unheard of and even discouraged. English is not their native language. They can't imagine we're interested in their views and actually would let them vote on how to spend thousands of dollars. If it's common for me to have a meeting in my office using at least two translators to guide the conversation, is it any wonder that appreciating cultural differences is a major component of my work?

I must know as much as possible about the cultures of the people I serve. I've learned that they want to know about our culture. In fact, they often wish to embrace many aspects of our culture. The following story makes the point.

Several years ago, one of our teachers suggested we do away with the Christmas program. When I asked why, she said we were enrolling students coming from cultures that didn't celebrate Christmas. She suggested we substitute a

Winter Festival for the Christmas program. I said I'd take her suggestion to our Parent Advisory Committee for their views and get back to the staff.

At the next committee meeting, I related the teacher's idea and asked the parents what they thought we should do. A Chinese father stood and spoke: "I came to this country from Canton, China. I want my children to celebrate the traditions of my adopted country. We should continue with the Christmas program."

A Latin mother took the floor. "Do you really mean that?" she asked.

"Yes, I do," he replied.

Before this meeting, Latin and Asian parents sat on opposite sides of the aisle. Now they mingle.

We continue with the Christmas program. The subject hasn't come up again. I'd add that the teacher who made the suggestion went on, a few years later, to spearhead a full-blown effort to revitalize our Flag Day celebration. Now we have a wonderful Flag Day. Parents and students participate eagerly.

Student populations are becoming more diverse. In California, the students in the public schools speak more than 91 languages. Similarly, Falls Church High School in suburban Fairfax County, Virginia, has a diverse student population and a staff working hard to make sure the needs of those students are met. Ethnic minorities are moving out of the large urban areas. They're moving to small communities in states where educators have had little experience working with diverse cultures.* Educators want to know how to better serve people from *all* the cultures represented in their school community.

In fact, service is the name of the game. Parents expect you to provide service to them and to their children. If they don't expect service, you should teach them this expectation. It's through service that you will generate parent involvement at a level that will breathe renewed vigor into your school.

*It's little wonder that the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development produced the video-based staff development program *Multicultural Education* and published the book *The Evolving Multicultural Classroom*, by Rose Reissman (both in 1994).

Some of you may be asking yourselves, "What's the point in teaching parents to expect good service from your school?" This is the reason: If you anticipate their needs by telling them what you should be doing for them and how to evaluate whether you're doing your job properly, they'll see that you're a decent and aboveboard person. Once they know this to be true, you will have eliminated a major obstacle to your objective: increasing parent involvement.

Parents are going to get busier and busier. They're working night and day, and often they have more than one job. They want the best for their children. They want you to be the best. They want you to prove you're the best. Isn't that what every major company is trying to do? They're all trying to prove they're the best. Look at the television commercials of the major phone companies competing for our business. They're always telling us what they can do for us that the competition cannot. We should do the same.

The Future

Ethnic diversity will increase worldwide. In some areas, there will be conflicts between ethnic groups. The schools may often be the battlegrounds where these conflicts are born and nurtured. But remember— conflicts create opportunities for leadership.

Parents will continue to work harder to make ends meet. It will be more difficult to qualify for welfare. Ethnic minorities will move to the suburbs and beyond. Asian populations will spring up in unlikely places like Deadwood, South Dakota, and Riverton, Wyoming. White flight will escalate. Towns once considered remote or undesirable are being rediscovered and lauded. It's happening now in places like Elko and Las Vegas, Nevada. People are returning, or moving for the first time, to Montana. How do I know this to be true?

According to the 1990 Census, 40 percent of the Anglo people living in Los Angeles County left. Last year, more than 6,000 out-of-state drivers licenses were surrendered in Elko, Nevada. My office sends student records weekly to tiny, remote towns nationwide. A frequent reason is that

Asian families don't want their children exposed to gang influence.

* * *

In summary, I'd say parent involvement used to proliferate, and then it waned. It'll continue to wane—and it'll bedevil you unless you do something about it.

How do you meet the objective of increasing parent involvement, saving your job, marketing your school to the point where people will lie, cheat, and steal just to have their children at your school, as well as increasing the status of public school education? What do you think? Can it be done? You bet.

2
Laying the Foundation

I MENTIONED EARLIER THAT PHONE COMPANIES ARE WAGING A relentless battle for your business. Even casual television viewers are unable to escape their back-to-back commercials. These phone giants don't care that they're buying time on the same program. I'm certain you've noticed that several companies are telling you how much they can do for you. I don't wish to belabor the point, but you should study television commercials. They work. And they work with the families you serve. Why not hitch a ride on the coattails of the best advertising minds in the nation? What works for them, can work for you. Already schools are being played against each other—and you want to come out on top. You need to excite parents and have them volunteer at your school. Commercial firms specializing in educational materials realize that you need to involve parents; that's why they're reaching out to you.

Each week you probably receive mail from companies offering to sell you tip sheets on how to increase parent involvement. I read the same material. Sometimes I get new ideas; but they're quick fixes. So far, I haven't seen ideas that address working with the ever-increasing number of cultures and minority groups affecting schools. Sometimes I receive material that's been translated into Spanish, as if being translated means it's going to be effective. What these hucksters haven't realized yet is that people—in this case, the families you're serving—are crying out for a relationship. *You can provide the relationship.*

I have a wonderful relationship with my school community. If you take care of the parents, they'll get involved, volunteer, or do just about anything you request. They'll take care of you.

The First Step

I've been the principal at my present school for the past 15 years. During that time, I've placed 23,000 positive phone calls to the parents of my students. Most of these calls have been on weekends and at night. Not even one-tenth of one percent have been during school hours. This method of recognition guarantees that everybody wins. It's a sure-fire method for increasing parent involvement.

When I was assigned to the school, I discovered that there was no system in place for recognizing student achievement other than what the teachers invented for their own classes. I told the teachers I wanted to have an assembly every Friday morning, at which time we would recognize two students from each class. We have 22 teachers, so we would recognize 44 students. Each teacher was directed to pick a "Student of the Week" and a "Super Reader of the Week." They were to notify the students they had been selected Thursday afternoon before they went home. Students were directed to invite their parents to attend the weekly 8:30 a.m. Friday assembly. (Weekly assemblies are better than monthly assemblies. They provide continuity and more chances for students to experience success.)

Some teachers resisted. They wanted to know the criteria for picking the students. I explained they were professionals and they could decide the criteria. I didn't care if the criteria differed from room to room. Still, some balked. I told them I'd expect the names by noon on the first Thursday we put the plan into action, or I'd come to the room and select the students myself, trusting in nothing but blind luck. I had the names by the deadline.

In addition, I required each teacher to fill out forms for both categories. Figure 2.1 shows the form we use. I insist that the teachers fill the forms out completely and that each teacher in grades 1–6 complete two forms. Kindergarten teachers are required to fill out only the Student of the Week award until they have students who are reading.

The Assembly

About 50 parents attend each week, many with cameras and camcorders. I call up the Super Readers

FIGURE 2.1

Student of the Week/Super Reader of the Week
(Circle One)

Date _____ Name of Student _____

Grade _____ Circle One (Boy/Girl) _____

Teacher's Name _____

Reason for Receiving Award _____

_____

_____

_____

Parent Name _____ Home Phone _____

Work Phone _____

and proceed down the row, passing out the red ribbons reserved for Super Readers, and at the same time give a little speech about the importance of reading. I project my voice so the entire student body of 650 students can hear, as well as the staff and the parents. Then I do the same with the blue ribbons for the Students of the Week. This time I speak about the importance of doing your best and describe the attributes of good students. In both cases, I make sure to praise the students. (Notice that I give the speeches as I distribute the ribbons, so we don't waste time.)

While students form the award line, I make general announcements of interest to the staff, the students, and the parents. I remind students not to go with strangers and to use crosswalks, and I remind all concerned about upcoming events. I keep a copy of the assembly agenda for documentation purposes. Many parents attend each week just to hear the news. Since school starts at 8:30 a.m., many parents are present because they've come to drop off their children. Over the years, the teachers have added to the award process on their own: They send students to receive math certificates. In addition, each week, we have a new set of safety patrol students who receive recognition; and we give other special awards from time to time.

We also recognize staff effort. We recognize teachers, instructional aides, other school employees, and district personnel such as maintenance workers.

the forgotten people of many school districts. Recently, for example, the maintenance department installed air conditioners in five of our classrooms. We invited the men who did the work to attend the assembly, and we gave them appropriate recognition.

Why do we do this? Because it's right, and it's good business. School secretaries, maintenance workers, and other "classified" employees often live in the district—and nothing beats word-of-mouth advertising. It helps for parents, teachers, and students to see the big picture. Of course, when our school has a maintenance problem, we always get fast service.

When test scores are released, I review the scores from a number of different perspectives. Sometimes I'm looking for students who have swept the field, achieving 100 percent in all aspects of reading or other academic areas. After I identify these students, I write a letter to their parents, telling them the good news and inviting them to attend a Friday assembly where we'll not only give their children special attention but add a twist. We have the student or students come up; then we invite all the teachers that student has ever had at our school to stand beside the student to be recognized as well. Although the student did well, so did the teachers—and they deserve to be recognized. You'd be surprised at the number of teachers who spot students who qualify for this honor—students I've missed. In short, teachers desire and need recognition as well. Even with all the business we have at an assembly, we can usually complete one in 15–17 minutes, a small price to pay for a lot of good will and, most important, happy students who now feel better about themselves. The next step is the clincher.

Calling the Homes

Each weekend, I take the award slips home and start calling the families of the students. I usually have to make 38 to 44 calls. I can make about 18 to 25 calls an hour. I call in the evenings on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I also call on Saturday and Sunday mornings at 9 or 10 a.m. With the slips in front of me, I more or less follow this pattern:

> Hello. This is Mr. Davis, the principal of Emerson School. May I speak with Rebecca's mother or father?

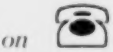
If a parent or relative is not home, I explain the purpose of my call and say I'll call back. I've promised the students I'll call their parents when they receive one of these ribbons, and I keep my promise no matter how many times I must call. Sometimes I call as many as seven times before I reach an adult, who may be working at unusual hours. Friday evenings and Sunday mornings are often the best times to reach parents.

Let's continue with the conversation. Rebecca's mother has come to the phone.

> Mrs. Wheat, this is Mr. Davis. How are you today? I'm fine, thank you. I'm calling to congratulate you because Rebecca received the Student of the Week award from her teacher, Mrs. Rietow. Rebecca received the award because she's completed all of her assignments ahead of time and volunteered to assist other students with their math. She turned in a beautiful art project as part of our Disciplined-Based Art Education program, and she's always kind to her fellow classmates.
>
> Mrs. Rietow and I are very proud of Rebecca, and I wanted to call you and congratulate you. Please tell Rebecca I called.

Of course, I'm relating only one side of the conversation. Parents often ask questions about school and other matters. They may wish to know the time of the next PTA meeting or the truth about some rumor sweeping the neighborhood. I often ask their opinion about school matters. I might ask them what time they'd like us to start Open House. I ask if they can volunteer on specific projects. I ask if they're pleased with our level of service.

I'm sure you see the value of all of this—but let's walk through it:



- Mrs. Wheat is receiving a call from Mr. Davis *on his own time* to tell her good things about Rebecca.
- Notice that the teacher, Mrs. Rietow, is mentioned twice. Mrs. Rietow receives free positive "mentions."
- Rebecca feels wonderful because Mr. Davis called her home to report that she's doing well. Rebecca goes to

school with renewed interest because she had a moment of importance at her home that came about because of her efforts. When Mrs. Wheat hangs up, other people in the home want to know who called and what Mr. Davis said. It's mentioned that he said Rebecca is kind and helps others. (It's possible for us to become what people say we are.)

• I've touched base with a parent. Sometimes I learn something. On other occasions, I recruit a volunteer. Often the parent has some nice comments about the teacher, the school, or even me.

In two hours, I've touched base with nearly 40 families—remember, that's 40 families *per week*— and I have my finger on the pulse of the community. The parents and students are my customers. They pay my salary. Without them, I wouldn't be in business. Businesspeople must know what their customers want and how they feel about the product. Without a doubt, with this system *everybody wins.*

If a parent compliments a teacher, I write the compliment on my memo pad, which has pressure-sensitive carbons, and put it in the teacher's mailbox before he or she comes in Monday morning. This is a nice way for the teacher to start the week. When the teacher provides an especially well-written recommendation for an award, I write a note to the teacher on the same pad and put the note in the mailbox. This gives the teacher some positive reinforcement. (The memo pads come with 100 memos to a book. I started this practice about three years ago, and so far I've written more than 18,000 memos. The memos provide me with a partial record of my work and help keep me on track.)

Fine-Tuning the Calling Process

For many of the families I serve, English is not their primary language. How can I call the homes if the parents don't speak English? I used to use translators, but now I use them much less, especially with Asian families. It works out better if I make 98 percent of the calls. I dote on quality control.

When I was using translators, my Spanish-speaking home-school coordinator would call the families where we

expected the parents would speak Spanish. I had a multilanguage Asian home-school coordinator; she'd call the Asian families. I'd call the families we were fairly certain spoke English. But as my Asian population grew, and the number of Asian languages increased, I wasn't comfortable with this and sensed the process wasn't working properly.

Each day, when we dismiss school, I stand in front of the school and say goodbye to the students. I shake hands with many of them, tie their shoelaces, and, on request, pick them up. Many primary students think it's a kick to be held aloft by the principal. It also sparks goodwill. Parents gather to meet their children. Many of these parents had received ribbon award calls, and they should have been responding to me in a more positive way. This wasn't happening to the degree I thought it should, especially with the Asian parents I knew were receiving calls.

I decided I'd make all of the calls, even to the Asian families. If I ran across a family where no adult spoke English, I would talk to the student and leave the message or continue to call back until I reached an adult who spoke English. I was rather intimidated by this prospect, but I wanted the parents to receive the best possible message from the school. After all, this was a new service we were providing; and, like the phone companies, if the service doesn't work as well as you expect, you don't need it.

I found that at many Asian homes there was usually someone who spoke English, especially if I called Friday nights or Sunday mornings. As soon as I started making the calls to the Asian homes, the attitudes displayed in front of the school improved—and the level of Asian parent involvement changed dramatically for the better. Once in a great while, I'll reach an Asian family where I'm never able to find an English speaker; at that point, I ask one of the Asian instructional aides to make the call.

Now I make all calls. When I reach a home where the parents speak Spanish, I ask them, in Spanish, to wait a moment and I pass the phone to my wife, Carolyn. For several years, Carolyn was the administrative assistant to the mayor of Mexico City, so her assistance is sometimes an advantage. Now Spanish-speaking parents realize I have some exposure to their language and culture. (Notice I say

that "sometimes" it's an advantage to have assistance. Later I briefly describe what happened when we employed an "expert" who was not as helpful as we had anticipated.)

Taking Stock

Let's do some math. If I call about 44 families a week, I will have called about 1,540 families in a 35-week school year. There are 650 students in our school. Of course, many of the families have more than one child in the school, so the odds are that the family will receive more than one call a year from me. If they have two children who started in kindergarten and were promoted out of our 6th grade, I've probably called that home at least 14 times over the seven years they have each been in the school.

If someone called your home that many times relating specifically what was neat about your child, wouldn't you think that person had your child's best interest at heart? Wouldn't you feel he cares? Wouldn't you feel he was not just some bureaucrat? Wouldn't you feel inclined to help him when he needed help? *Wouldn't you want to volunteer at a place that treats you like you're important?* Wouldn't you feel like you had a strong relationship, a relationship that was giving you a great deal without expecting much from you? I believe the answer is yes on all counts.

Still not convinced? Consider the kids. They deserve to be praised for their efforts. If you don't praise them, it may never happen. In some homes, praise is in short supply. There's no doubt in my mind that the calls have saved some children from whippings and even helped parents think of their children in a more positive light. Think of yourself. Don't you like to be recognized for your efforts? And wouldn't you come to the assistance of a person who had legitimate, nice things to say about you? You'd certainly be willing to help someone who wanted to know your opinion on any subject of your choosing and then would publicize your opinion. In the next chapter, I explain how we do this at our school.

3
The Survey

SHOW ME A PRINCIPAL WHO HASN'T SURVEYED THE SCHOOL community in the past five years, and I'll show you a principal who hasn't got a clue—or who cares little for the views of parents. To give the benefit of the doubt: Maybe this principal just hasn't realized the value of a survey, providing it's a suitable survey. Principals who care have conducted surveys since they arrived on the job.

Surveys take different forms. Multiple-choice surveys are fashionable. Sometimes parents are asked to rate school services on a scale of 1 to 10 or even with letter grades. Frequently, surveys ask "safe questions," the idea being that you don't ask questions that may elicit responses that unnerve. Unfortunately, the surveys are often couched in education jargon, an unnecessary complication that causes people of good sense to throw up their hands, wondering aloud if educators can be taken seriously.

The principal usually collects the surveys, tabulates the results—and frequently that's the last time they surface. Pity. Let me suggest a method to survey parents that's easy and increases parent involvement.

The Open-Ended Survey

Every two years, I write the letter shown in Figure 3.1 to the parents I serve.

This is a simple letter, and it is translated into Chinese, Vietnamese, and Spanish. Our district can't afford to hire translators who are United Nations qualified, so simple text is best.

FIGURE 3.1
Survey Letter

EMERSON School
1225 Emerson Street
Emersonville, XX 00000

Dear Parents:

All of us at Emerson School work for you. You pay our salaries. We wish to do our best, so I would appreciate it if you would take time to write your comments below regarding our service. Tell us how we can improve and what you feel we do right. Please be candid. You may write your comments in your native language. I'll have the comments translated, and in a few weeks we'll share the results of the survey with you.

We will expect each student to bring a survey back, so if you have more than one student in the school, please complete as many of these surveys as you have students. If you're unable to write different comments on each survey, you may copy your comments on to the other forms.

You may use other paper if you wish, but please attach that paper to this letter.

Sincerely,

The Principal

On a Monday morning, I take the letter to the classrooms and explain the importance of the letter to the students. I tell them we want to know from them and their parents how we're doing. I suggest they sit down with their parents and offer their views to be included in the response. I stress that I'll expect a response back from each student. I focus on this project with a vengeance. Each day I go to the rooms to collect the returned surveys. If a student loses the survey, I send a new one home.

If a student tells me her parents refuse to participate, I call the parents and ask them to participate. I continue this effort until I have a survey back from every student, or two weeks have passed, whichever

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

comes first. We never achieve 100 percent, but our *worst* response was 60 percent. Any survey company will tell you that 60 percent is outstanding. Imagine our delight when, one year, 80 percent were returned, our highest return ever.

We have found that parents are helpful in their responses—even parents with criminal records and histories of substance abuse. These parents frequently write helpful comments; they participate. The next part of the process is tedious but rewarding.

Processing the Survey

I read all surveys that arrive in English the same day. Those written in other languages go to our translators at once. They translate the comments on the same page, adding paper as needed. A clerk makes four copies, punches three holes in the margins, and helps us assemble the materials.

Using large, three-ring binders, we group the responses by categories, using several levels of dividers. First the material is divided according to language, then according to length of the comment, then according to positive and negative comments. So, for example, we have the lengthy positive English comments first, followed by the Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and other languages. It's fun to read the positive remarks in the "language chapters" first.

Getting the Most Out of the Results

Why would we need the original plus four copies of survey responses? I read and keep the original. I study the material carefully; within it I detect clues to improving our performance and generating additional parent involvement. The survey is a tool. I use it for two years, and then we repeat the process. The four copies go to the following people:

- The staff. A copy is placed in the staff lounge for the staff to read. They devour it.
- The superintendent.
- The board of education.

• The parents. This copy is placed on a hall table for parents to read.

We also bring the survey to the Friday assemblies and to special school functions, such as Open House and Back to School Night so parents can see if their comments are included, as well as to give them a chance to read what other parents have written.

We've never edited the material, nor would we. So far we've had no painful or untrue comments. I suppose if I read a comment attacking a person by name or in such a way the person could be identified, I would edit that portion of the material unless it were about me. Should that be the case, I would leave it in because it would be helpful. Having some people dislike you can be advantageous.

I review the results, looking for helpful information or matters that need immediate attention. When I read a complaint, I call the parent to see if I can clear up the matter. If I read a compliment, I bring it to the attention of the recipient(s). It's common for parents to praise teachers as a group. I read these remarks at staff meetings. The staff appreciates this. I write thank-you notes to parents who write comments that are especially nice. For many of our parents, these notes are the first thank-you notes they have ever received. (I buy thank-you notes by the case.)

I learn which parents prefer to write in their native languages. My translators tell me if the parents are proficient in their native languages, helping me to determine the education level of my clients. I spot trends. I see where we have consensus. For example, I learn that most of the parents want the back gate locked at all times. I see they're happy with the computers we purchased and feel that school employees care about their feelings. When I spot comments by parents proposing new ideas or modifications of projects already in place, I recruit them for our parent involvement program.

When the staff read the comments, they learn about themselves. Of course, they've read the comments collected in their rooms that arrived in English; and some of our teachers read other languages—but they're especially interested in seeing what parents have to say about them when the comment is written in a language other than English. They get a glimpse, always an important glimpse,

into the minds of the people they serve. In fact, the survey helps teachers recruit room mothers and parents with specific skills.

When the superintendent reads her copy of the survey, she gets an idea about how we're doing our job. She learns what parents think. She can use the survey results to evaluate me, something I encourage. I don't believe members of the board of education actually take the time to look at the survey, though I make sure they're aware of it. Even if they just contemplate the survey, I've achieved my objective.

When parents read the comments, they see their own responses. This validates the process, especially if they've written critical comments. They read the comments of other parents. Since the community is multicultural, they begin to see they have quite a bit in common with people they may have perceived as "different." Parents volunteer when you ask them their views and when you prove that their thoughts are significant.

Students skim through the survey; they see their families' comments. They learn that their thoughts are important.

Further Benefits of the Survey

Once I understand the results of the survey, I write a series of reports to parents, telling them what we've learned, why this or that is so, and what we can do about it or where we have our hands tied. I've found that people like this approach and can usually accept the reasons. The next chapter explores the issues of trust and confidence inspired by the survey.

Information is the name of the game. Not only will floods of information set you free, and protect you from the "whims of change," but it will also generate more parent involvement. The information you gather in this survey will also protect you from other forces. Let me illustrate.

When federal and state reviewers show up to take a look at your operation, whip out your big binder and rest your case. They'll see you're reaching out to the parents and students you serve, involving them, and taking their views seriously. They'll know at once you have the courage to get up and do what has to be done. What could be better?

4
Building a Sense of Trust and Confidence

WE FEEL COMFORTABLE DOING THINGS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE pleasant with us. Sometimes we feel obligated to do unto others as they've done unto us. It also helps when we attempt to understand people, at least a little bit. People are eager to be understood. If you long to recruit volunteers, you must understand your clients. They cry out to be understood.

Understanding Your Client Base

Businesspeople know they must understand the market and the people they hope to develop as customers. Businesspeople longing to crack the Japanese market, for example, learn the Japanese language and study Japanese customs. In Mexico City, you'll see many Mexican businesspeople learning Japanese as fast as possible, and you'll see Japanese people speaking Spanish—with prefect accents. As I mentioned earlier, at our school many Chinese students arrive from Latin American countries speaking both Spanish and Chinese. So, to paraphrase Carl Sandburg, change isn't creeping in on little cats' feet; it has pounced.

When I began teaching, my clients were English-speaking Anglo students and a small number of Native American students. I set out to study the tribal cultures represented in school. I sensed I needed more knowledge about the people I was paid to serve. Two years later, I was in southern California teaching in schools in low socioeconomic neighborhoods with students packed in dilapidated housing projects. I'd never seen a housing

project. I hadn't worked with African American or Latin students. I'd never heard of welfare. I needed to learn about my customers.

I learned basic Spanish phrases. I read popular African American literature and started what has become an extensive record of travel in Latin American countries. I wrote extensively for African American magazines and learned so much about Mexico that I can discuss, with modest authority, the interworkings of Mexican political parties or the specific ingredients found in favorite sauce recipes. Then, when I had this routine perfected, my professional life and client base changed dramatically because of rapidly changing demographics.

Over the past 15 years, the student population at my school shifted from a mix of mostly Anglo and some Latin, to mostly Latin and some Anglo. Now it's nearly half Latin and half Asian. We have 23 Anglo students. That's a big change in a short time. And while the Latinos often come to us speaking English, Spanish, or both languages, the Asians arrive speaking many different languages. This complicates our work.

Demographic changes affect your school community and the way you conduct business. Some of our teachers went from saying, "I don't want any Spanish-speaking students in my room," to "I don't want any students in my room who speak Asian languages," to "I want all the Asian students."

Years before, when the Latin influx began, we hired experts to brief us on Latin and Chicano cultures (there's a big difference). Now we've brought in Asian experts to do the same. I learn better firsthand, so I packed my bags and set out for Southeast Asia, making two trips to the area over the past 10 years and soaking up as much of the cultures as possible in Canton, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Macao, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. I learned basic phrases, ate exotic food, took pictures, used public transportation, and returned home armed with "enough stuff" to prove I know something about the experiences of my customers. After all, how could I expect people to volunteer if I didn't reach out by demonstrating I was interested in their lives? (I always keep in mind that many of these people have often arrived from other countries. For

them, the United States is a foreign country; and they are, to varying degrees, frightened.)

I selected my best photographs, had them enlarged, hung them in my office, and continued reading as much as I could get my hands on about the experiences of the people I'm paid to serve. But suppose the people you're serving aren't like you. Well, they're *people*, aren't they? It will help your career to know about their experiences.

Do you work in a farming community? Read farming magazines. Know a lot about the weather. Farmers love to talk weather. Get a basic understanding of the local crops. When Mr. and Mrs. Williams arrive for parent conferences and you can talk weather and how depressing it is that the price of soybeans has dropped through the floor, you'll be considered a cut above your average educator, thus setting the stage for recruiting volunteers.

> Dad gum, Nellie, that's the first principal I ever met who's had any notion at all about the problems we farmers face. The more I think about it, the more I reckon if we're ever going to have a female superintendent 'round here, she could be the one.
>
> You're right, Albert. You're always right.

Now, if you're serving the upper crust, it's time to bone up on polo ponies, charity work, the stock market, and Palm Beach real estate. Get the picture? Know the customer. Here are a few basics you need to know about your school community.

- What is the average income?
- What is the average level of education?
- What are the predominant religions?
- Are your patrons liberal or conservative?
- Where are they from?
- What are their plans for the future?
- What do they expect from their schools?
- What did they like about the administration that preceded you?
- What did they dislike about that administration?

Things change. Predict change and plan for it. How can you predict change? A principal who pays attention has the inside track. You'll know before the government census takers that the population is changing in your school area. If you ever get a chance to go out to lunch, take a look at the people around you in the restaurant. Have they changed? Most principals drive around the school community. Are single-family dwellings giving way to townhouses? Get to know the police on the beat and the top management at the police department, as well as the editor of the local paper. These people can provide local and timely information.

If you live and work in a small town, you know firsthand what's happening. In large urban sprawls like Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago, many educators serving in the inner city schools live in the suburbs—so it's vital they know about the area where they work. Read the local paper, especially if it's one of those throwaway papers.

But you can do a fine job of knowing your client base and tear down everything you have built up if you don't show what I call "truth in leadership."

Telling the Truth/Keeping Few Secrets

People volunteer when you tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Avoid keeping secrets. Operate on the assumption that everyone is as smart as you and certainly knows something you don't. You'll be ahead of the curve.

Educators are masters of artful and archaic euphemisms that outlived their usefulness the same day Icabod Crane retired. These expressions include "powerful learning experience," "language experience," "mentally challenged," "visual aid,"—and my favorite, "the whole child." Unfortunately, many educators continue to speak in platitudes and bland phrases. Now we must play catch-up. The way to do so is to be truthful.

If you cannot tell the whole truth, tell as much of the truth as possible and say simply that you are not allowed to disclose more at this time. Timely truth is essential. Here's an example.

Mrs. Crumpacker wants to know which teacher you'd recommend for Wanda, her darling daughter. You've known the Crumpackers since the beginning of time. You know your teachers even better. If your child were going through your school you'd put your daughter in Mrs. Hefflefinger's room, but you feel obligated to say that all of your teachers are marvelous and you're sure Wanda would do well in any classroom.

Big mistake. Carol Crumpacker isn't stupid. She's been quizzing the neighbors and knows which teachers have the best reputation. She knew that Mrs. Hefflefinger's classroom was the one for Wanda. Since you haven't been candid, your reputation now has a dent. Carol won't raise her hand when you need volunteers. And, never forget, Carol is out in the neighborhood talking about you. She's telling the mothers and fathers with a soft spot for Mrs. Hefflefinger that you told her that all teachers were created equal. This obvious absurdity now makes them look like they know little when actually they know as much as you. (Even nitwits know teachers are not created equal.)

In fact, many in the neighborhood agree with your privately held opinion of Mrs. Hefflefinger. You should have told Mrs. Crumpacker that you agreed with her. You could have added that you know Wanda and that Mrs. Hefflefinger would be a perfect match for Wanda. But you fudged. The parents involved know you fudged—and now you've incurred a liability. Always tell the truth, and be quick about it.

Timely Information

We live in the information age. People lust for heaps of information. Most want it served hot and meaty. But some school communities prefer information done up in intellectual ribbons and bows. Your task is to discern how your school community likes their information and heap it on their plate, or place it neatly. Deluge them with newsletters, tip sheets, and nifty inside "stuff." Know your market and write for it. Write to your parents in the first person. The information you disseminate is the light illuminating the work you do with your staff and the community.

Think ahead. Plan what you want them to know in advance, and write at least the beginnings of your material so you can rewrite and add to it as you get to your publication deadline. This is where you can continue to preach the need to volunteer and spell out how people can help. In this way, you won't feel so pressured when you must crank out a newsletter.

Subscribe to a service that provides canned tips designed for busy parents on how to assist their children. Some services allow you to sign your name to the material. If the material reflects your basic philosophy, you can live with it and assist parents with less personal effort. Keep in mind that at present 78 percent of married women with school-age children have full-time jobs. They need material that's helpful, concise, lively, chatty, even funny from time to time, and that caters to the burden they shoulder. Remember, if you show me you really understand me and my problems I'm going to be indebted to you. You're indebted to the parents. They pay your salary. You want them to be indebted to you; in that way, you can be equal partners, indebted to each other.

Equal Partners/The Personal Touch

I believe in *providing service to my customers*. The smart shopkeeper who provides excellent service wants your money, but he also wants you to generate good word-of-mouth about his shop. He wants you to suggest ways he can improve his service. (In Mexico City, Wal-Mart customers are never out of sight of signs that say, "You're The Boss.") You've partnered when you offer suggestions. It's a case of the client or customer and the shopkeeper's working together for mutual benefit.

Research discloses that the parents don't want a client/professional relationship with the principal. *They want someone who cares and understands them.* They want an administrator who will level with them. If you measure up, parents will come through for you. They'll get involved because you'll be one of the few educators they've ever met who gives them a feeling of equality.

Over the years, I've worked with thousands of parents. Most were decent, hard-working folks. About a third were run-of-the-mill crooks, small-time dope dealers, prostitutes, just plain nuts, unreasonable, and fanatics of every stripe. I've worked with some school board members who made those parents look like Tinker Bell. These folks are my customers, and I've developed positive relationships with most of them. The more I got on their case to come through for their child and the school, the more they produced. And they have done so because they know I really believe I'm working for them. I expect them to do their share; if they don't produce, I let them know in no uncertain terms. Some would call that leadership; it seems to me it should be called, "Doing Obvious Work."

Parents who pitch in get praised by name in the bulletins I send home, explaining their contribution. Now other parents know precisely what Mrs. Martinez did, and we've drawn attention to her unselfish acts. I mail a handwritten thank-you note to her home. Now I have an equal partner and a volunteer for the rest of my time at the school.

Although I dislike casual clothing, I wear it to Friday assemblies because many parents attend. The parents at my school don't have much money. They need to see me without my suit.

I jog where they jog. I play where they play and buy groceries at their stores. I want the parents to see I'm a regular guy. I wear a Halloween costume and march in the parade. I look as ridiculous as possible. When students are dismissed, I'm in front of the school working the crowd.

Principals are known for their ability to rise to the occasion. I'm sure you help raise funds for families who have their backs to the wall and send sympathy cards to the families you serve when there's a death in the family. I also often attend wakes.

Do you remember when, as a little kid, you received your first letter? I remember that day. I was thrilled. Write notes to your students and their parents. For example, while you're visiting Mrs. Rietow's room, Harry gives an original answer that required creative thought. Write a note to Harry and mail it to his home. Susie's wearing a beautiful outfit. Tell her she looks

nice and write her parents a note telling them as well. (A word of caution: Never write these notes just for public relations.) You send letters when it's the right thing to do and completely legitimate. Do otherwise and professional death will knock at your door.

Pledges Build Commitment

Another way to be sure parents understand they are equal partners is to require students and parents to sign pledges—to do homework, to get up to come to school, to use appropriate language and dress at school—that signify their commitment to school.

Most seasoned principals would agree that in previous lives they were either supply sergeants or managers of turnip factories, charged with getting more blood out of each turnip than the previous management. And yet successful principals find a way to make it all work. Pledges can help. One of the best ways you can help students and parents and recruit volunteers is with schoolwide pledges.

Figure 4.1 shows what we call the "academic pledge"; Figure 4.2 shows the "profanity pledge."

Each student, without exception, returns both pledges. If they don't, I call the parents and insist. If they need to be hounded, I hound. The parent and student must both sign. If they refuse to sign, we "reason together," a la Lyndon Baines Johnson. To date we have a perfect score.

When a student uses profanity, I take the student to the front of the classroom and stand there while the student apologizes to the class. We have 650 students. Offenses are so infrequent that I do this only once or twice a week.

When parents show up at school wearing T-shirts with words that are inappropriate, I tell them they cannot come on the campus until they change their shirts. If a student is frequently tardy, I go to the homes and wake up the parents and their children. In some cases, I have dressed the student. What's good for the students is good for the parents, although to date I have never dressed a parent.

And you know what? They love it. In fact, the parents I put straight are my biggest supporters. They're the ones I can really count on. The pledges

FIGURE 4.1
The Academic Pledge

EMERSON School
1225 Emerson Street
Emersonville, XX 00000

Dear Parents,

The purpose of this letter is to encourage you to join with your child in rededicating yourselves as a family to academic excellence and good attendance. If you'll sit down with your child and discuss the importance of education, completing homework, attending school, and being punctual, your family will prosper from this commitment.

We insist that each family sign the following pledge, one for each Emerson school-age child in your family, and return it to school now. We'll post the names of the children who return the pledges. They'll be proud their family cares about them.

We expect you to do this because we know you value education and school attendance. Please return the lower portion of this letter to your child's teacher.

Sincerely,

The Principal

Academic Pledge

The _____
[Family Name Goes Here]
believe in academic excellence, being punctual, regular attendance, and completing homework. We have dedicated ourselves as a family to do our best to help you educate our child, and our signature indicates we will honor our pledge.

Student's Name _____
Grade _____ Room Number _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature _____

Student's Signature _____

FIGURE 4.2
The Profanity Pledge

EMERSON School
1225 Emerson Street
Emersonville, XX 00000

Dear Parents,

It seems strange to say this, but I can assure you profanity has become so common in this country that some people believe it's okay to say anything that comes to mind.

School is a place to learn. School is a place to learn to use proper language. School is a place to develop lifelong friendships with fellow students and school employees and to be confident one will not have to hear profanity.

The first time a student uses profanity at school, he or she will be counseled and the parents called at home or at work. The student will be required to apologize to his or her classmates. Should the student use profanity again, we will repeat the steps above and send the student to Saturday school. With a third offense, we will repeat the steps and suspend the student. If that happens, you must meet with me at school to discuss your child's behavior; and the offense becomes a part of the permanent record.

Emerson is a school where correct language is honored and incorrect language is not tolerated.

You and your child must sign the lower portion of this letter and return it to school. We must have one for each student. There are no exceptions.

Sincerely,

The Principal

Profanity Pledge

_____
[Student's Family Name Goes Here]

We understand that profanity isn't allowed at Emerson School and that we're responsible for our child's behavior.

Student's name _____
Grade _____ Room number _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature _____

Student's Signature _____

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

become the downbeat, the signal flare, the 21-gun salute, that this school is a place where we are serious about learning. I promote that fact by being seen.

Classroom Visitations

Most principals know it's important to be seen on the campus. Many of you have read about "Management by Walking Around." While we know it's important, we sometimes wonder how we can fit it in. My goal is to visit each classroom every day. I know visiting classrooms and speaking with students generate volunteers. Most days, I make it to each room—but that wouldn't happen if I didn't play a trick on my conscience.

I log in the date and time I arrived at school. When I leave for the day, I enter the numbers of the rooms I've visited and the time I'm leaving. I then have a daily record of which rooms I've visited—and if I don't record "visited all rooms" I know I have to try harder the next day. Of course I also log formal observations. I end up with a solid record of Management by Walking Around. But the key to making the visit pay off in volunteers is what I do in the classrooms.

I take class lists with me and put a checkmark next to the name of each student I speak with. Since our classes average 30 students, in about 35 days I can have at least one personal mini-conversation with every student in the school. This is good for everyone; but not everything is rosy. Sometimes conflict rears its wonderful, *not ugly*, head.

The Positive Side of Conflict

I love trouble. I love conflict. Not a lot of trouble or a lot of conflict, but just enough to make things better. Any Marine can tell you that trouble and conflict provide opportunities to test your skills. If you can resolve a conflict and eliminate trouble, you learn whether you have the right stuff. If you don't have the right stuff, it's time to be restuffed or to rethink your life.

When I tell parents at an assembly not to drive onto the campus because it endangers students and that I'll have

them arrested or make the arrest myself, it's a little risky; but it shows I mean business when it comes to protecting their children. Parents want to get behind someone who will protect their children.

Threats, real or imagined, generate opportunities for you to show leadership. If you have the right kind of leadership style, it pays off in more support.

Principals probably resolve more disputes in a year than master diplomat Henry Kissinger could handle in two lifetimes. Principals are skillful at this. *Each dispute is a golden opportunity.* Don't give up. Solve the problem and make the most of it,

When I'm running across the playground to intercept the man with the drawn gun or the teenager waving a bayonet, I'm thinking, "If I can pull this off, not only will we make it through another day, but I bet I'll be able to get more parents to volunteer for our safety patrol." (I'm not kidding or exaggerating.) In the next chapter, I share some ideas on how you can manage your communications about these conflicts and other aspects of your important work.

5
Communication Management

COMMUNICATION IS THE SECRET. A SUPERB COMMUNICATOR CAN accomplish anything. Consider two presidents—from different parties: Ronald Reagan was called the "Great Communicator." Lyndon Johnson, a suburb communicator, persuaded many people to do what he wished. So can you. You'll run short of volunteers in a jiffy if you don't communicate effectively with everyone. Let's take a look at some proven techniques for developing a relationship with the media, certainly a precursor for increased parent involvement.

Communicating with the News Media

It's imperative to have the media on your side. When a strike looms or someone makes charges (either true or false) against you, you need the media in your corner. If you want support for your volunteer program and other programs through free media coverage, you must understand how people working for the media think. Then you can make good use of their services.

I've been writing for newspapers, magazines, television, and radio for the past 25 years. I've belonged to a major West Coast press club for 20 years. I'm sorry to say that, in general, the press doesn't like educators, especially public school educators. They think we're square, stupid, shallow, and poorly educated and that we have a propensity for not telling the truth. They're certain—and correct—that we withhold information. They know educators fear them and, depending on their sense of fair play, use our fear to our

disadvantage. I've sat around with the press and listened to them laugh and swap stories about how they fixed this or that superintendent or principal. If this is the case, how could you get them on your side? I use an easy and honest method. It's as close as your media.

Read everything in the local papers and watch local television news. Keep a notebook handy and record the names of the reporters covering education or, for that matter, whoever writes or broadcasts anything you agree or disagree with. My rule of thumb is that if the story evokes an emotion in me, I need to jot down the name of the reporter and a few notes about the story. It doesn't have to be a story about education because you never know when the reporter will be reassigned to education stories. You need to have a positive relationship with the reporter should he or she suddenly start reporting on education. If you see a story you like, write to the editor and tell the editor how much you enjoyed the piece. Explain why. Prepare a copy of your letter for the reporter. Now, with both letters in hand, call the reporter and express how much you liked the story and tell the reporter you're sending a letter to the editor complimenting his or her work. Mail the letters. In effect, you're telling the reporter's boss that her reporter has done a good job. Let's take a closer look.

You wrote the letters but called before you mailed them. Now you've done what educators do better than anyone else: You've developed that good old educational mainstay, "anticipatory set." Frankly, I think we should jazz up our profession a bit, at least in this case, and replace anticipatory set with a "seduction scenario," because you've seduced the reporter. Reporters look for praise just like anyone else. They want praise from their readers or viewers.

Many media people believe that one letter received means that 10,000 people wanted to write but didn't. The reporter is aware her boss is thinking, "10,000 people like this reporter's work." If the editor hired the reporter, then you have in effect also complimented the editor's good judgment.

Column or air space is the threat hanging over the head of each reporter. Space must be filled: Reporters are under

horrendous deadlines. They want a story with what they call a "hook." Tell them you plan to jump into a tank of starving piranhas if your students increase the number of books they read—and they'll be there. Tell them you plan to call your program "A Nip in Time Saves Their Minds," and Dan Rather will be there, or at least Connie Chung. Provide reporters with interesting tips or hooks, make sure they're praised, and they'll be on your side. One last point: Names sell papers, especially local papers. Give print reporters lots of names.

Automatic Dialing Services

A couple of years ago, a company based in the South heard about our parent involvement program and offered us a free voice mail system for a year. Now we send messages home in several languages and receive messages from parents, as well. Parents call in for the latest homework assignments. They leave private messages for teachers at the teachers' voice mail boxes and for me as well. This communication system can be used in any number of ways. It's highly effective for turning out parents for meetings. It can be used to squelch rumors and to serve as a telephone tree for emergencies.

The system calls each home seven times or until the home is reached. Each week we receive a printout from the company showing which numbers were reached and the operator intercepts, which usually turn out to be disconnected numbers, something all principals want so they can follow up for valid new numbers.

I write my message, pick up any touch-tone phone (sometimes I do this from my home), and record my message. When I receive the weekly report, I attach the message to the report. Now I have a record of how we reached out to the community, subject by subject. I keep these records and include them with the documentation I present to various state and federal review teams. It costs us $2 per student per year. We use School Improvement Funds to pay for this service: It's a bargain.

Send telephone messages to parents telling them you need volunteers for specific projects. Give them a start and

end time for each project, and you'll probably get more volunteers than you need. You can even use this system to praise your volunteers. Here's an example.

> This is Mr. Davis at Emerson School calling to tell you that we'll have Back To School Night from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on September 26th. At that time, we'll also have our school elections, and we hope you'll turn out to vote. We need volunteers to run our elections, so if you can help please see me before the 10th of this month. I would like to thank Luke Ledebur, Eugenia Gratto, and Adrianna, Lorrena, and Alejandro Gonzalez for their help last week in stuffing the information packets we send home at the beginning of the school year. Thank you for your attention and be sure to attend Back To School Night. Please be sure to vote.

Every school needs a voice mail system. The principals who pioneered our system say it's essential; now all of our schools have voice mail. It costs us $14,000 for one year to service 7,000 students. This is inexpensive.

If you have the money, get the system now. If you're not sure you want the system, see if districts in your area have a system. If they don't, you're on fertile ground; this means you're in an area where a voice mail outfit would like to be. You can offer your school as the pilot project. Contact a voice mail company and work a deal with them, as we did. Suggest they put the system in at their cost for a year. Tell them if you're happy with the system, you'll sign a contract for the next year.

Maybe you have a superintendent who believes voice mail is a frill. When you tell her it's free for a year, she'll soften up. But if you show her how it can increase attendance at school board meetings and other district meetings, she'll see the light.

Now let's take a slightly different look at how communicating with staff, students, and parents can increase parent involvement.

Communicating with Staff, Students, and Parents

Armies move on their stomachs. Keep the troops well fed and make sure they have plenty of clean dry socks, and they'll go to hell and back for you. A school

staff is pretty much the same, but they want information and recognition more than they want food.

I've got 69 employees at my school. Less than a third are teachers, and 12 are instructional aides. The instructional aides, for the most part, are residents of the community. The aides know the community. They know who would be interested in volunteering. The teachers also have suggestions on who may volunteer. The best way to learn who these potential volunteers are is to stay in close communication with your staff.

Get out and about. Hit the halls and the playground. Be seen. Talk to people. Corner parents when you see them. Ask them for their help. I know a principal who spends his time hunched down over his computer. He thinks he's getting a great deal of work done, but the custodian runs the school—and the parents know it.

Have weekly aide meetings. Use the same agenda you use with the teachers. Ask the aides what kind of inservice programs they would like to have, and keep everyone informed. Ask people for their help. Tell them how well they're doing. Write them notes about their good work. Have we covered this before? Yes, but it's important.

Speak with your students. Find out what their parents do. You'd be surprised how many of the kids have parents who can provide some sort of service that will benefit your school. By talking with the kids, I found a parent who worked for a printer. He printed our mission statement and school rules on the finest poster board. Now we've postered the entire school. As you know, the students can be little gold mines for information of all sorts—but particularly for finding parent volunteers.

Speak and write to your constituents. Let them know you're always there for them. This approach will bring commensurate rewards for effort expended. In the next chapter, I share some ideas on how to link the community power structure to the school for the benefit of all concerned. ??

6
Linking Community Agencies to the School

HERE ARE SOME METHODS I USE TO ENCOURAGE LOCAL LEADERS TO join our cause. When the local power structure is on your side, "powerful volunteers" are working for you. You and your parents pay their salaries, so they should help your school. To hook them, you need either a *natural* or *manufactured* connection. I call connections of either type *linkage*.

Linkage

I never say "networking," the currently popular term, for meeting people and developing alliances. I don't network. Linkage is a different matter. I believe in linkage. I'd rather link-up than network any day. A link makes you think of a chain, and a chain is stronger than a network. A network is fragile. A link isn't easily broken. Links can be fashioned out of what people need.

For example, what do politicians need besides being elected? They need a crowd. Principals can provide crowds, as the following story illustrates. Crowds are the iron ore of links.

We have an annual Read In. We invite parents, staff, and the entire community—as well as local politicians, the mayor, members of the city council, the police chief, the city librarian, and assorted crowdseekers we've determined could be helpful. Since we're close to Los Angeles, it's fairly easy to land some sort of star. One year singer Helen Reddy came to our school. (I told her she should dedicate her hit, "You and Me Against the World," to principals and their

secretaries.) Of course, when you have a star, everyone wants to attend the Read In so they can rub shoulders with a celebrity. People are then eternally grateful you invited them to be a part of this celebration of the importance of reading.

At the Read In assembly, everyone is introduced, and the famous rub shoulders with the locals, and a good time is had by all. The politicians have their crowd. They've had a chance to show the voters, your parents, they cared about their children. They were reminded you have a constituency you can produce on demand. There's your link. From now on you can get them to "volunteer" in any number of ways.

Write letters to your parents naming city politicians who have arranged for the nice things at their school and send copies of the letter to the politicians. They'll clamor to help the next time you need assistance.

But you say your school is in Dry Creek, Colorado, and you haven't had a celebrity since Helen Trent pulled up stakes and went off to the sweet bye and bye with Lord Brenthrupt. You can still land lots of celebrities by mail order. Write to celebrities. Don't limit yourself to movie stars. Write to famous scientists, doctors, and world leaders. A decent bookstore sells books with their addresses. A persuasive letter elicits responses. Ask them to attend your Read In, but if they can't come, would they please take the time to write a letter to your students telling why they believe reading is important. Letters flood in. Read the best letters at the assembly. Have the mayor read the letter from Jack Lemmon. Then give a copy of Lemmon's letter to the mayor. Sometimes you can post the letters on the hall bulletin board.

When you receive letters from Charlton Heston and the President of Mexico, copy them and send them home with the kids so their parents can read what the celebrity has to say about reading. I've even known parents to frame the copies of the letters and hang them on the walls of their homes.

Practices such as these build what I call *excitement attributes*. Excitement attributes are "extras" the customer doesn't expect. Give them something they like and don't expect, and they'll hurry back

for more. Excitement attributes can contribute to the school's sense of mission. Part of your mission is to have more parents involved in the school. If parents feel they have the inside track and are part of the "team," they'll come through for you.

Tracking and Bagging

To use a hunting metaphor, don't waste time tracking and bagging the lightweights. Go after big game. Invite the state superintendent to your school. Then invite all of the people who would like to be seen with the state superintendent. You bag big game by reading *a lot* of newspapers. You look for those little clues buried in obscure articles that give you insight into what your quarry likes or dislikes. These clues tell you what you need to know to convince those who have influence they should visit your school.

When I read that Tony Plano (you saw him in *JFK*, *The Three Amigos*, and *An Officer and a Gentleman*) had a soft spot in his heart for helping Latinos get ahead, the clue leaped off the page. I had been looking for a Latino role model to visit the school.

I wrote to Mr. Plano, and he agreed to attend the Read In, read to the students, and give the keynote speech. And what a speech it was. It was rags to riches and then some. It focused on the importance of education, excellence, and all the things that schools and especially principals believe are important. It couldn't have been better; and the volunteer windfall derived from that assembly has yet to subside.

Negatives Count

I believe principals must be prepared for the negative events that pop up from time to time. When gangsters murdered one of their own on our campus at 2 a.m. with broken beer bottles, I had to demonstrate if I had any really important leadership skills. When a plane crashes on your campus or a sniper starts picking off your kids, you know you'd better handle it right—or the fact you're second in

line to John Dewey in educational thought will evaporate like fog hit by a gale-force wind.

Be on record as being foresquare for law and order early in your career. File the documentation that proves you're tougher than Clint Eastwood and Gloria Steinem combined. People who go fishing know you must match the bait to the fish. So it is with potential volunteers. Volunteers are anxious to help when you give them attractive bait. I've got a neighborhood of would-be sheriffs, so negative incidents spur them to volunteer. Though, of course, I don't want a late-night campus murder, if something like that happened, I would seize the opportunity to bolster our volunteer forces. Once I have parents doing security patrols, I can attempt to swing them over to academic volunteering later. Another way to convert parents to volunteers is to have them participate in a community event.

The Community Event

Parents want to be involved; but, like you, they don't have spare time—especially Monday through Friday. Since schoolpeople already work hard, I hate to tell you this—but you may have to work on an occasional Saturday or Sunday with a community event.

At one of our schools, the principal has PTA meetings once a month on Saturday. Since the school has a heavy Latino population, the PTA spices up the Saturday morning meeting with *menudo*, a breakfast soup made with tripe and a liberal dose of spices and hominy. Toss in some ranchero music, and a huge turnout is common. Parents who attend often end up volunteering to work at a school activity.

Years ago, one of our teachers came up with a super idea: a parent/student essay contest. We now have this contest annually. Droves of parents and students turn out. What makes it even sweeter is that the contest has the parents working with their children on a common project. Here's how we do it.

We pick the essay subject. Since we have a great deal of ethnic diversity, and many of our parents are new to the country, we often create a topic such as, "What

the United States Means to Me," or "Is This the Land of Opportunity?" Parents and students are encouraged to enter. They may enter in their native language; and many do. The essays are judged by native-language readers. Winners are selected at each grade level before the "community event." Everyone is invited, and the winners read their essays in their native languages. After the Cambodian father, in his native language, reads how he fled for his life from Cambodia, we do a translation in the other languages common to our school. The result is a lot of understanding, some tears, and an increased desire to work together for a common cause.

All educators surely realize by now the importance of getting more parents involved in the schools. At the same time, ethnic diversity in the schools is increasing by leaps and bounds. Fearless principals, *and you are fearless*, wonder how you will pull this off. You must have some basic understandings of your ethnic groups. Space doesn't permit me to share all I've learned about this subject, but in the next chapter I relate what I believe is basic information and describe some traps you must avoid.

7
Working Effectively with Ethnic Groups

ON OCTOBER 16, 1994, THE CBS SHOW *60 MINUTES* RAN A provocative piece on the problems the people of Wausau, Wisconsin, are encountering as a result of a large migration of Asians, primarily people of the Hmong tribe, from Laos. During the Vietnam War, the Hmong, a nomadic tribe, found chiefly in northern Laos, fought on our side and spied on the Viet Cong for allied forces. They suffered greatly because they helped us. Many died; some estimates run as high as 50,000. A Wausau church congregation decided to sponsor a small group of the Hmong and brought them to Wausau. Over the years, starting in 1975, the Laotian and Asian population of Wausau has grown from zero to nearly 4,000. Nearly 92 percent of these are Hmong.

Wausau has a public school enrollment of 9,713, of which 1,650 are Laotian and, for the most part, Hmong. One-third of the kindergarten population is composed of Asian students.

Until the mid-1950s, the Hmong didn't have a written language. It was an "oral culture." Some say the Laotian government decided long ago not to bother to expend much effort to educate this northern nomadic tribe that lacked a written language. Now Wausau school employees are faced with a Hmong population in which many adults, especially older parents and relatives, read or write neither their native language nor English.

In addition, the Hmong don't usually schedule their lives, at least to the degree so many people in the United States do. According to Yer Her, a Hmong instructional aide

in Wausau, the Hmong arise each day and do what seems right at the time. They don't keep in mind that Thursday at 8:30 a.m. there'll be parent conferences at school. Yer Her must call families the day before a school function to ask parents to "schedule" the event. Wausau public schools continue to refine their methods as they work with these challenges and persevere in their efforts to provide the quality education for which they're known.

I mention this to show that in Wausau, in the heartland of the country, school administrators face many of the same problems associated with changing demographics that their counterparts face daily in large urban areas. This challenge will increase across the United States and become more complicated. As educators, we must learn to help ourselves so we can assist the new families. Is "expert advice" needed? What traps do we set for ourselves? Can we avoid being snared by our rush for a quick fix? Remember, the new ethnic parents and students of today are going to be your long-term clients—and your volunteers. You need them on your side, 100 percent, if you wish to involve parents right on down the line until you hand the reins over to the next principal.

I can tell you from personal experience that a school enrollment composed of students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds makes your work more gratifying. Each day you're "tested." These tests guide you in deciphering new-found information about yourself. Armed with the knowledge you'll gain from these ethnic interactions, you'll not only be better prepared to serve your new parents and students, but you'll enrich your life beyond measure. And as your district takes on the larger role of working with people of various ethnic groups, you'll reach a point where you'll consider hiring some help.

Beware the Expert

When my district noticed more immigrants arriving from Mexico, they hired a Mexican/American "home-school coordinator" to work with parents, children, and educators. It was determined, without checking to see if it were true, that we knew nothing about Mexicans and would need to be

educated. At that time, I knew little about Mexican people or culture. I looked forward to listening to our expert.

The expert said that Mexicans "couldn't make it through the week" without an ample supply of *pan dulce*, or sweet rolls, hot chocolate, tamales, enchiladas, tacos, and the type of food we're familiar with in most of the "Gringoized" Mexican restaurants found in the United States. His advice was completely untrue.

Another "expert" was hired. He said all of us who weren't Mexican were guilty of discriminating against Mexicans from our birth on up to the day of his bully pulpit sermon. He didn't know us; he was just certain he was correct. The educators sat quietly through his harangue.

I wasn't surprised the educators present at these brainwashings and semi-public whippings didn't protest. They reacted as most people do when in the hands of an "experienced guide," chugging up river aboard an "African Queen," in a jungle they don't call home. They went along. They went along as hostages do with terrorists who intentionally whipsaw your emotions to maintain your state of confusion. We were held hostage by our ignorance. When you lack knowledge of a subject, it's difficult to question what's being said.

Years passed. I could see more clearly. I learned about Mexicans and Mexico by traveling and reading, and, as I mentioned before, talking to my wife. I learned about the numerous and precise class distinctions impeding the personal development of most Mexicans locked in "their place" by a pecking order they know by rote. I learned there is often little in common between Mexicans and Mexican/Americans. I learned that many Mexicans arriving at our schools—both parents and children—don't read, write, or speak Spanish well, and neither do many of their counterparts in the United States. I discovered that in Mexico you could dine on the finest international cuisine and that many do. I learned that not all Mexicans listen to ranchero music, the stateside equivalent of our country and western music. I learned a lot. I developed a keener understanding of how ignorant some North Americans are about Mexico. I'll never forget a college-educated "American" asking me if Mexico had a university.

Finally, I realized that we were being fooled by our "expert" and that actually our expert was getting even for real or imagined slights she'd suffered over the years. We were gullible; we fell for it. By the time we awakened, the district was 70 percent Latino; and the "expert" had shaped a constituency she could mobilize for a favorite cause at the drop of a sombrero. If a school board member wanted to pressure the superintendent to demote or fire a school employee and hire a candidate of the board member's choosing, all the board member needed to do was drop a hint to the expert. The expert would present a long or short list of favors she wanted in exchange. Once this clandestine agreement was struck, the expert would work behind the scenes to incite parents against the targeted employee. When the goal was accomplished, it was pay-off time. We were being held hostage by a person who knew little about Mexico and even less about its rich and varied populace.

When Asians began to arrive, we nearly repeated our mistake by employing a man with a similar agenda. Now, a tiny bit wiser, we mustered a broad base of experts. We kept a tight rein on those who would use their knowledge to place a stranglehold on district politics.

We did a number on ourselves with our Mexican expert. Sometimes I wonder why. Then I remember that educators frequently hire a consultant or expert to remedy a need rather than examine their problem to see if they can solve it themselves. Often the solution is at hand. When you have no doubt you need an expert, go slow. If you cannot solve your problem, ask yourself if you can afford two experts who aren't philosophically in tune. *Diverse opinions are the wellspring of brilliant decisions.* Do your research. Study. Mental elbow grease wins the day.

The bedrock of parent recruitment is a thorough knowledge of your client base. Since Latinos and Asians make up the bulk of the newcomers coming to the United States, let's take a brief look at some aspects of their cultures. Let's see if we can discover some clues as to how you can incorporate their culture and customs in such a way as to provide you with an unending pool of parent volunteers.

Latino New Arrivals

For most newly arrived Latinos,* "choice" is what it's all about; the choice of staying in their native country with little opportunity to get ahead in life, or braving the journey to "Gringolandia" or "El Norte," as the United States is often referred to. There one can perhaps rustle up a grubstake to take home and live a better life. Isn't that why many people in the "lower forty-eight" trekked north to Alaska for the great Klondike gold rush?

The family structure of Latino new arrivals is often traditional, although it's rapidly becoming more Americanized to speed the fulfillment of economic dreams. The mother can be involved at school as long as the house is tended to and dinner is ready when the father arrives home. Dad doesn't want Mom going to school meetings at night, especially without him. Often he doesn't want to attend school meetings. The women often walk their children to and from school and pass the time chatting with other mothers on the playground. They're eager to talk with people like themselves to gather tips for surviving in their new environment. There's my clue.

If I provide some of the support parents need to make their lives bearable while they're here, I can gain their trust and they'll work with me in the school. This helps their children. I must help them feel comfortable if I hope to assist their children. I make it clear I'm not a threat. They must know I can be trusted. The more I know about their country, the better. If I know little or nothing, I ask questions. Usually people like to tell others about their country.

I encourage involvement initially by having parents do things with which they feel comfortable. They teach native dances to our students and plan fiestas to celebrate holidays we observe as part of our multicultural curriculum. Little by little, I expose them to school

* I use the term *Latino* rather than *Hispanic*. Regardless of the term you use, you may be certain that more and more Latinos will arrive in the United States regardless of any legislation passed at state or federal levels. Most Latinos enter the United States for economic reasons. Others flee repressive regimes.

governance committees. In a year, I have them involved in more sophisticated activities.

In working with Latino parents and children (or those of any culture, for that matter), I try especially hard not to stereotype or let any preconceived notions get in the way of working together professionally. For example, I could make the mistake of assuming that because you "look Latino," you're from Mexico. If you're from Costa Rica or Guatemala, this assumption may be offensive. Educators must do their homework—learn about the cultures of their clients.

Asian Newcomers

When you don't know precisely where your Asian clients are from, it may be best to refer to them as *Asian* rather than *Oriental*. The term *Oriental* doesn't seem to be in fashion—though it's an acceptable term, and I know it's used in Hong Kong by Chinese.

The subject of Asians and their cultures is as huge as Southeast Asia. I can only provide a peek, and a little peek at that, about some Asian cultures. I hope I can make the point that a lifelong study of this subject wouldn't scratch the surface of this part of our world. Having traveled extensively in Southeast Asia, I can tell you that once you've been there, you're drawn back again and again. Also, I'm not an expert on Asians specifically or in general. Some of the things I've learned in the past 15 years, however, may be helpful to other educators. Since you'll want your Asian parents active in your school, it's imperative you have at least some idea of how people from different Asian cultures view their world. For example, it's critical to understand the importance many Asians place on *saving face*.

When my new Chinese home-school coordinator took to rinsing his dentures in the lounge sink while other employees ate lunch, I had a problem. When one of my Vietnamese instructional aides began to leave an extensive daily trail of spittle in the hallways and on the playground, I had a dilemma. When Asian parents squatted by the dozens at our school gate, blocking foot traffic, I decided that for safety and cosmetic reasons this must stop. I could have asked the squatters to move, but this would have been insensitive.

Most of us raised in the dominant U.S. culture would find these incidents discomforting. But before I rush to stamp out what bothers me, I always get a grip on my emotions and investigate.

I approached these problems from the perspective that most people don't wish to offend and need to be guided gently to the common path. In each case, I was faced with a behavior that offended the majority. It was expected that I'd do something about these behaviors. I knew if I put myself in "the face of the offenders" I would reap a bounty of resentment.

First, the squatters. The parents were arriving at school to pick up their children and making themselves comfortable while waiting, in a physical position common in many Asian countries—squatting on their heels. Squatters positioned themselves just inside the front gateway. I tried standing close to them, thinking if I stood close enough they'd get up and move. Each day I inched closer to the squatters until I felt hot breath on my calves. Finally, I decided to close the gates almost completely 10 minutes before the first wave of squatters would arrive; then, seconds before the dismissal bell, I'd go out and ever so slowly swing the gates full back. In two days, the squatters realized the gates would be moved. They didn't wish to change positions, so they squatted closer to the street. Over a period of time, they realized that squatting, a traditional form of "body arrangement" in many Southeast Asian countries, could be inconvenient in this new land. Now only newcomers squat. They no longer block the hallway.

It wasn't as easy with the dentures. I spoke to the home-school coordinator as pleasantly and as discreetly as I could regarding time-honored denture practices in the United States. He listened patiently with award-winning courtesy. Day after day, he rinsed his dentures in front of the staff while they ate, and each day they came to me to complain. Interestingly enough, they never complained about their typical "American" colleague who parked her toothbrush, toothpaste, and dental floss in front of her while she ate, signaling her intent to take care of her dental business.

I spoke to the coordinator repeatedly. Each time, I felt I would have won an award for diplomatic discourse while still receiving high marks for not evading the subject. After my fifth attempt to solve this problem, he solved it for me.

The home-school coordinator gave me a long, handwritten letter citing excerpts from the Constitution of the United States, and even a few points from the Bill of Rights. Twice he mentioned "the land of the free and the home of the brave." The red, white, and blue received three honorable mentions. He concluded with his resignation.

Win some, lose some. A year later I hired a different man who had the same dental practices. I decided to turn the matter over to my Chinese resource teacher. I don't want to know what she said. It was momentarily difficult for me to relinquish this chestnut because my dad had been a dentist; but she took care of it.

I'm not aware of treatises on phlegm, but I have observed that many Asian people wish to dispose of phlegm as quickly as possible: on the spot. In the United States, this is condoned if you can prove you hold the deed to the spot, but most of us don't wish to see the deposit process. This is a personal matter, at least until you start depositing your private waste about the school. I spoke rather directly to the instructional aide with this behavior. He mentioned the Bill of Rights but curtailed the behavior.

Up Close and Personal with the Chinese

Usually Chinese immigrants to the United States are from Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), or Vietnam. If you bring a hundred Chinese together who are strangers to each other and put them in a room, they'll quickly sort themselves according to country, class, and education.

Chinese people seem to agree on one thing: Education rules over business. It's especially significant for U.S. educators to realize the important advantage they can enjoy with many Asian cultures, and especially with Chinese, by virtue of the fact that they're educators. Many Chinese people don't trust

businesspeople. They do trust educators. On occasion, Chinese businessmen ask me to intercede on their behalf with Chinese colleges and universities so that they might market products to sell to the schools. I learned this the lucrative way when a Chinese businessman asked me to broker a deal for bar code equipment to be used in the library of a large university in the PRC.

The "classmate syndrome" is the tie that binds. If you and I are Chinese and we attended the same school together, that's a plus. If we graduated the same year it's a supernova plus. If we were born and bred in Taiwan, attended the same school, graduated in the same class, and then ran into each other again in Alhambra, California, we'd quickly renew the bond. Many Chinese people have compartmentalized themselves. Keep this in mind and you'll be better able to serve their needs.

Now let's put 16 Chinese strangers in a room. You're the principal. You wish to bring these people together to work on a committee. You have four from Taiwan, four from Hong Kong, four from the PRC, and four from Vietnam. You introduce everybody and leave the room briefly. Regardless of their differences, or their opinions of other groups, they will all agree that the person with the most formidable education should be the leader. They'll accept that person as the chairman of the committee even if he or she is not from their country. Education always holds sway over other factors.

* * *

The Hmong of Wausau are testimony to the fact that the new ethnic diversity in the United States is rather esoteric. There's much more to Latin America than the Mexicans and much more to Southeast Asia than the Chinese. It will be up to you to ferret out the information you'll need to enhance your service to your new customers. I hope you'll do so because it will mean a great deal to you, your students, and their parents. Your new knowledge will make you a better person.

Conclusion Teamwork, Truth, and Trust

> If you always do what you did, you're going to get what you got.

I don't recall the author of this quote, but I jotted it down once; and it still holds true for me. Educators believe the public thinks well of their work; but actually they're separated by a deep crevasse. Education reformers do not seem realize how little support there is for their ideas, even though it should be apparent from a casual glance at the landscape, where one views increased criticisms and failing referendums.

According to Deborah Wadsworth at the Public Agenda Foundation in New York City, a think tank founded in 1975 by Cyrus Vance and Daniel Yankelovich, educators and the public have vastly different approaches to analyzing the problems facing our schools. The foundation did a study in Connecticut. According to their findings, "68 percent of the educators said the schools are better today than when they were in school, while just 16 percent of the public share that optimistic view."*

People may be happy with the way you run your school, but they're not happy with the education establishment. If educators hope to recapture the public's trust, they must show they're worthy. It's a certainty that parent involvement follows trust. If, as a profession, we

*Deborah Wadsworth (November 30, 1994). "Bridging the Divide: What the Public Is Telling Educators Could Help Resuscitate School Reform." *Education Week* 14, 13: 48, 38.

continue to do as we have done, nothing will change. We must become generators of trust. *Trust blossoms where clients are championed.*

And while you must be their champion, you must work together as a team, as a "group of champions." Even the Knights of the Round Table worked together as a team (as King Arthur would attest, if we could find him). Your students, parents, and staff make up your school community—your team. Think of them as a team. Talk to them as a team. Write to them as if they're the team. Insist on teamwork, and give them frequent reports on the team's victories and upcoming "games."

When your school is second out of 13 in attendance or beats all of the other schools in the district in math, inform the team. Give them ample credit. Make it clear you're in this together.

Figure 8.1 shows an example of how you can get your team to focus on the next game (see p. 56).

This letter makes it clear we're fallible. That's important. Remember what I said about how reporters view educators. Worldwide, people rush to help when you cry out for assistance. Natural disasters prove the point. Since the public holds a dim view of our efforts, we need to catch up. We can close the gap, at least in part, by leveling with those we serve.

The teamwork letter tells the truth. Also, I make sure that parents know that I want to hear from them if they are not going to attend and that I'll be in touch. *After you do this a few times, parents catch on that the school means business and that the principal not only tells the truth, but he or she offers the truth, without them asking for it.*

If I had to pick one key to increasing parent involvement, it would be *"volunteering truthful information to those you serve."* Principals seldom lie—but are often adroit at avoiding painful truths. Principals are experts at "making nice." In a country where many citizens have lost faith in their leaders, principals can break new ground by providing unexpected amounts of truthful information. Beat them to the truth, and they'll beat a path to your doorstep.

Don't be afraid to take chances or even to change. You will become even more successful if you give credit where due. Be true to your goals and care for your staff and your customers. Trust your instincts and have compassion.

FIGURE 8.1
Appeal for Teamwork

EMERSON SCHOOL
1225 Emerson Street
Emersonville, XX 00000

Dear Parents,

I'm pleased to tell that on the ITAS test this year, our students scored well in most areas. We beat last year's reading scores at all grade levels by at least 5 percentile points, and in the 2nd grade we were up 17 points. That's proof that teachers and parents working together can make the critical difference. You'll recall that at the start of last year we organized parents and teachers to examine why our reading scores had remained flat for the past year, and apparently our theories and solutions were correct. However, math is a different story.

We gained in math at each level except Grade 4. The year before last, we lost considerable ground in 4th grade math, and this year this unwelcome trend continues. We must make progress. We know precisely what our students don't know, but we are unable to put our finger on how to teach the material so they understand it. We're doing something wrong, or we're simply not doing something we should be doing. We need your help.

This coming Saturday, at 9:00 a.m. in the school cafeteria, we'll be having a meeting of the 4th grade parents, teachers, and some of our district office staff to see if we can identify what's wrong and how we can fix it. Your attendance is critical to our success. We'll expect all 4th grade parents to attend. If you cannot attend, call me so we can keep you informed.

Sincerely,

The Principal

Visit the homes of the people you serve. Parents feel comfortable on their own turf. They will be more likely to open up to you in their home. Their children will be especially proud that the principal or their teacher came to their home. Have a cup of coffee or tea with the parents. Once in a while, take a few parents to lunch and listen to what they have to say. Tell them you need their advice. Everyone likes to give advice. Listen to their suggestions— and if you use their recommendations, give them credit. Learn the names of the people in the family so you can inquire about them. Call the homes of key parents from time to time and tell them you are just calling to see if there is any way you can be of assistance. Make sure you help deliver the Christmas baskets.

* * *

I wish I could meet all the principals who might read this book, because principals are special people—people made out of flesh, bone, tenacity, grit, good judgment, and the ability to handle a multitude of problems simultaneously. I wish we could all fit in some huge room. Perhaps the Seattle Skydome is available. Since the sky is falling in that dome, we'd feel right at home.

In this book, I've written about what works for me. I know it can work for you. If you use some of these suggestions, you may work harder in a different way— but your rewards will be beyond measure.

ASCD Resources on Multicultural Education and Diversity

ASCD Books

The Evolving Multicultural Classroom by Rose Reissman. 1994. 144 pages. Stock # 1-94173. $13.95.

How to Respond to Your Culturally Diverse Student Population by Sarah LaBrec. Wyman. 1993. 52 pages. Stock# 611-93180. $6.95.

The Middle School—And Beyond by Paul S. George, Chris Stevenson, Julia Thomason, and James Beane. 1992. 166 pages. Stock# 611-92016. $14.95.

Global Education: From Thought to Action. Kenneth Tye, editor. 1991 ASCD Yearbook. 184 pages. Stock# 611-91004. $19.95.

ASCD Networks

Global Education Network. For information, contact Marilyn McKnight, Milwaukee Public Schools, Forest Home School, P.O. Drawer 10K, Milwaukee, WI 53201. Telephone: (414) 645-5200.

Bilingual Education & Other Appropriate Practices for Language Minority Students. For information, contact Rosita Apodaca, Assistant Supt., Dallas Public Schools, 3835 Canot Lane, Dallas, TX 75244. Telephone: (214) 824-1620.

ASCD Select

Multicultural Education. A resource packet of articles, abstracts, and other documents drawn from *Educational Leadership, ASCD Update* and *Curriculum Update*, the *Curriculum/Technology Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, as well as other sources available in the public domain. Includes the *ASCD Resources Diskette* (DOS) and a discount coupon for a savings of 10% on any one ASCD product. ASCD Select #10. Price: $34.95.

Videotape

Multicultural Education. Features James Banks and Carlos Cortés in a 40-minute program that introduces basic principles of multicultural education. Includes a 113-page facilitator's guide and the book *Teaching with a Multicultural Perspective: A Practical Guide* by Leonard Davidman and Patricia T. Davidman (New York: Longman, Inc., 1993). Stock# 4-94033. Purchase: $328 ($ASCD members), $398 (nonmembers). Rent for five days: $125; Preview: $20.

Audiotapes

Educating for Cultural Diversity: A Conversation with JamesBanks. Presenters: J. Banks and R. Brandt. From ASCD's 1994 Annual Conference. Stock# 2-94146. $9.95.

Multicultural Education: A Critical Change Variable in the School System of the 21st Century. Presenter: S. Rawlings. From ASCD's 1994 Annual Conference. Stock# 2-94149. $9.95.

The Influence of Cultural Diversity and the Changing Family on Teaching and Learning in Middle Grades Classrooms. Presenters: E. Sparapani and F. Abel. From ASCD's 1994 Annual Conference. Stock# 2-94186. $9.95.

Educating for Citizenship in a Multicultural Society. Speaker: M. Turner. Close Up Foundation, Alexandria, Va. 1992. Stock# 612-92091. $9.95.

Association for Supervision
and Curriculum Development
1250 N. Pitt Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: (703) 549-9110 Fax: (703) 549-3891

About ASCD

Founded in 1943, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development is a nonpartisan, nonprofit education association, with international headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia. ASCD's mission statement *ASCD: a diverse, international community of educators, forging covenants in teaching and learning for the success of all learners.*

Membership in ASCD includes a subscription to the award-winning journal *Educational Leadership*, two newsletters, *Education Update* and *Curriculum Update*, and other products and services. ASCD sponsors affiliate organizations in many states and international locations; participates in collaborations and networks; holds conferences, institutes, and training programs; produces publications in a variety of media; sponsors recognition and awards programs; and provides research information on education issues.

ASCD provides many services to educators—prekindergarten through grade 12—as well as others in the education community, including parents, school board members, administrators, and university professors and students. For further information about ASCD, call (703) 549-9110 or fax (703) 549-3891. Internet access: gopher.ascd.org. Or write to ASCD, Information Services, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314.

ASCD's Executive Director is Gene R. Carter.

1995–96 ASCD Executive Council

President. Charles Patterson, Superintendent, Killeen Independent School District, Killeen, Texas

President-Elect. Frances Faircloth Jones, Executive Director, Piedmont Triad Horizons Educational Consortium, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina

Immediate Past President. Arthur Steller, Deputy Superintendent, Boston Public Schools, Boston, Massachusetts

Janice Adkisson, Staff Development/Early Childhood Supervisor, Arlington County Public Schools, Arlington, Virginia

M. Kay Awalt, Principal, Moore Elementary School, Franklin, Tennessee

Brenda Benson-Burrell, Assistant Professor, Secondary Education, Rowan College, Glassboro, New Jersey

Marge Chow, Superintendent, Richland Public Schools, Richland, Washington

Douglas Gruber, Director, Waterloo Region, Kitchner, Ontario, Canada

Edward Hall, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Curriculum, and Staff Development, Talladega County Board of Education, Talladega, Alabama

Joanna Choi Kalbus, University Lecturer, University of California-Riverside, California

Margret Montgomery, President, Professional Research Institute, Austin, Texas

David Rainey, Director, Arkansas Math Science School, Hot Springs, Arkansas

Charles Schwahn, Leadership, Management, and Organization Development Consultant, Custer, South Dakota

Judy Stevens, Executive Director of Elementary Education, Spring Branch Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Sherrelle J. Walker, Assistant Superintendent, Federal Way School District, Federal Way, Washington

Isa Kaftal Zimmerman, Superintendent of Schools, Acton Public Schools and Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools, Acton, Massachusetts

How to Involve Parents in a Multicultural School

This book is an up-close-and-personal, principal-to-principal discussion of parent involvement in an urban elementary school that serves a diverse student population, including students from Asian and Latino cultures. The author, Bruce Davis, relates many techniques he and his staff use to involve parents in the life of the school, including student awards assemblies, positive telephone calls to parents, annual Read-Ins, voice mail systems, safety patrols, surveys, pledges, and shared decision making. Davis emphasizes learning about the cultures of the students in the school, building personal relationships with them and their parents, welcoming diverse opinions, and telling the truth.

Bruce McDonnell Davis is Principal of Ralph Waldo Emerson Elementary School in the Garvey School District, Rosemead, California.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Alexandria, Virginia

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ISBN 0-87120-[illegible]